

## Flexible planning of assessment, a lever towards assessment for learning?

### La planification flexible des démarches d'évaluation, un levier vers une évaluation pour apprendre ?

### Planificação flexível de avaliação, uma alavanca para a avaliação com foco na aprendizagem?

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Volume 45, numéro spécial, 2022

Translation Issue

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113588ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1113588ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

ADMEE-Canada

ISSN

0823-3993 (imprimé)

2368-2000 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Yerly, G. & Monney, N. (2022). Flexible planning of assessment, a lever towards assessment for learning? *Mesure et évaluation en éducation*, 45(spécial), 249–274. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1113588ar>

Résumé de l'article

*L'article discute l'apport de la planification des démarches d'évaluation comme levier pour soutenir les enseignants dans la mise en oeuvre d'une évaluation pour apprendre (assessment for learning) en classe. Il propose une réflexion théorique sur les apports d'une planification flexible, caractérisée dans l'article comme une planification approfondie et structurée (hiérarchisée) des démarches d'évaluation mais qui laisse aussi une place importante aux ajustements dans l'interaction (dynamique) et qui implique les apprenants (interactive). La contribution de l'article est de faire le lien entre les travaux scientifiques portant sur la planification de l'enseignement-apprentissage et ceux sur l'évaluation des apprentissages. Les objectifs de l'article consistent à 1) expliciter ce qui caractérise une planification flexible des démarches d'évaluation, et 2) discuter des apports d'une telle planification dans la mise en oeuvre d'une évaluation-soutien d'apprentissage dans les classes.*

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## **Flexible planning of assessment, a lever towards assessment for learning?**

### **La planification flexible des démarches d'évaluation, un levier vers une évaluation pour apprendre?**

### **Planificação flexível de avaliação, uma alavanca para a avaliação com foco na aprendizagem?**

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**KEY WORDS:** assessment, assessment for learning, flexible planning

*The article discusses the contribution of flexible planning of assessment as a lever to support teachers in implementing assessment for learning in the classroom. It proposes a theoretical reflection on the contribution of “flexible” planning, i.e. planning that is thorough and structured (hierarchical) but that also leaves room for adjustments during the interaction (dynamic) and involves the students (interactive). The contribution of the article has been to link the scientific findings on planning the teaching-learning process with those on the assessment of learning. The objectives of this paper are to 1) specify what “flexible” planning of assessment is, 2) to discuss the contributions of such planning in the implementation of assessment for learning in the classroom.*



**MOTS CLÉS :** évaluation des apprentissages, évaluation-soutien d'apprentissage, planification flexible

*L'article discute l'apport de la planification des démarches d'évaluation comme levier pour soutenir les enseignants dans la mise en œuvre d'une évaluation pour apprendre (assessment for learning) en classe. Il propose une réflexion théorique sur les apports d'une planification flexible, caractérisée dans l'article comme une planification approfondie et structurée (hiérarchisée) des démarches d'évaluation mais qui laisse aussi une place importante aux ajustements dans l'interaction (dynamique) et qui implique les apprenants (interactive). La contribution de l'article est de faire le lien entre les travaux scientifiques portant sur la planification de l'enseignement-apprentissage et ceux sur l'évaluation des apprentissages. Les objectifs de l'article consistent à 1) expliciter ce qui caractérise une planification flexible des démarches d'évaluation, et 2) discuter des apports d'une telle planification dans la mise en œuvre d'une évaluation-soutien d'apprentissage dans les classes.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** avaliação da aprendizagem, avaliação-apoio da aprendizagem, planificação flexível

*O artigo discute o contributo da planificação dos procedimentos de avaliação como alavanca para apoiar os professores na implementação da avaliação para aprendizagem na sala de aula (assessment for learning). Propõe uma reflexão teórica sobre os contributos da planificação flexível, caracterizada no artigo como uma planificação aprofundada e estruturada (hierárquica) dos procedimentos de avaliação, mas que também deixa um lugar importante para ajustes na interação (dinâmica) e que envolve os alunos (interativa). O contributo do artigo é fazer a ligação entre os trabalhos científicos sobre a planificação do ensino-aprendizagem e aqueles sobre avaliação das aprendizagens. Os objetivos do artigo consistem em 1) esclarecer o que caracteriza uma planificação flexível de procedimentos de avaliação, e 2) discutir os contributos desta planificação na implementação de uma avaliação-apoio à aprendizagem nas aulas.*

## Introduction

### *From assessment “of” learning to assessment “for” learning: and whether flexible planning is a solution ?*

Implementing assessment in the classroom to support student learning remains a significant challenge for school systems and teachers alike (Laveault & Allal, 2016). Yet, for several decades now, formative assessment has been recognized as a powerful lever for fostering student learning (Allal & Mottier Lopez, 2005; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie, 2017). In more contemporary terms, today we speak of *assessment for learning* (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Laveault & Allal, 2016; Wiliam, 2011). This evolution of the learning assessment concept has revitalized practices, by emphasizing the importance of continuous assessment, active student involvement in the assessment process and overcoming traditional opposition between formative and summative assessment. This paradigm shift (De Ketele, 2012) is not only linked to the development of learning theories (Allal, 2019; Black & Wiliam, 2018), but also to changes in educational systems, notably with the emergence of the competency-based approach (Morrissette & Legendre, 2011).

To put this assessment for learning perspective into practice, the Assessment Reform Group outlined ten principles to guide teachers. One of these principles states that “assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning” (Broadfoot et al., 2002, p. 2). Planning should provide opportunities for the teacher to identify and ensure that students understand the objectives and success criteria, plan for the collection of information and organize opportunities for feedback, while remaining flexible, adaptable based on progress towards learning objectives. Lastly, according to this principle, the teacher should also plan the students’ role and involvement in the process.

Our aim in this article is to contribute to the reflection on the effective implementation of “assessment for learning” (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Laveault & Allal, 2016) in the classroom, through the specific angle of flexible planning of assessment as initially proposed by the *Assessment Reform Group* (Broadfoot et al., 2002). The objectives of this article are to conduct a theoretical reflection in order to 1) explain what flexible planning of assessment is, and 2) to discuss its contribution to the implementation of assessment for learning by teachers. To achieve this, our contribution is to foster dialogue around key concepts linked to both the planning of teaching-learning processes and the assessment of learning.

The theoretical reflection undertaken in this article is necessary because the link between planning and assessment of learning seems to be little or non-existent in teachers’ practices. Although the general contributions of planning are well known (Dessus, 2002; Tochon, 1989; Wanlin, 2016) and backward planning helps to focus planning on the assessment of learning (Hattie, 2017; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), Wanlin’s (2009) synthesis of the literature shows that elements linked to the assessment of student learning are very often not taken into account in teachers’ planning. For them, talking about assessment planning is very often limited to setting the date for the final exam (Sallin, 2020). The lack of planning of learning reinforces the fact that, in practice, assessment often remains an “afterthought” for teachers (Yerly et al., 2019); a summative test implemented in the context of tight school calendars. In this case, assessment of learning resembles more of an administrative act and hence departs from the aims of assessment for learning (Fagnant & Goffin, 2017).

The article begins by presenting what is known about the contributions of planning with respect to the two objectives of the theoretical reflection: the planning of teaching-learning and assessment of learning. The concept of flexible planning is then explained. Finally, the various elements are reintegrated to discuss the contribution of flexible planning in the implementation of assessment for learning in the classroom.

### ***The contributions of planning for teaching and learning***

The teacher’s planning competencies are recognized as a decisive factor for quality teaching and in-depth learning (Hattie, 2017; Tochon, 2013). Planning is a complex practice for which teachers devote a lot of energy in the pre-, inter- and post-active phases of their teaching (Dessus, 2002; Wanlin, 2009). It includes reflection, decision-making, operationalization

and judgment of the choices made (Clark & Yinger, 1987). A number of empirical research summaries (Dessus, 2002; Hattie, 2009; Wanlin, 2009) show that, at both primary and secondary levels, effective teachers are those who know how to plan their teaching and their students' learning. For example, experimental studies by Zahorik (1970) or Byra and Coulon (1994) (a sample of teachers who plan a lesson vs. those who do not) show that teachers who plan are "more focused on the students and produce better quality lessons" (Dessus, 2002, p. 23). In addition, these studies highlight the lack of success of overly rigid planning, which does not adapt to students' reactions during the learning process.

The main research data on planning come from the field of teacher thinking. The data are collected by various methods (logbooks, questionnaires, explanatory interviews, etc.). According to Wanlin's (2009) summary of the main French and English research studies from 1970 to 2009, teachers plan their teaching over different timeframes and at different levels, which may overlap or follow one another. There are different time-based (school year, week, day, etc.) and or content-based (chapter, sequence, session, etc.) planning granularities. Planning practices vary widely, both in terms of the methods teachers use and the intensity. The planners' profiles and needs are highly variable and depend on a number of factors (Lê Van & Berger, 2018; Wanlin, 2009). These factors include contextual elements (e.g., curriculum and textbook structure, timetable and school calendar organization, school culture) and individual elements (e.g., initial training, experience, teaching and learning concepts, perceived sense of self-efficacy).

In the various summaries (Dessus, 2002; Wanlin, 2009, 2016), professional experience is cited as one of the factors resulting in the greatest differences in planning practices. According to Tochon (1993), new teachers feel the need to plan more precisely and rigidly, whereas "expert" teachers are usually dissatisfied with rigid plans, viewing them as inadequate. They are able to plan in a more "flexible and adaptive" way (Tochon, 2013), i.e., to adapt to classroom circumstances and improvise better. Thanks to stable, positive routines and a good knowledge of the essential elements, expert teachers can adapt their practices to better support students and vary/adapt their teaching (Tochon, 1993). It is important to note that expertise is not measured in years of experience, but in terms of mastery of a competency. Teachers who are "adaptive experts" (Bransford et al., 2007; Hattie, 2017) are those who are able to see learning from the

students' point of view, situate them in relation to learning objectives, and be more flexible with their initial plans and strategies. This flexibility is possible thanks to a prior knowledge of expectations and mastery of various teaching strategies.

According to a teacher's profile and needs, planning can serve different functions, simultaneously or not (Charlier, 1989; Tochon, 1993; Wanlin, 2009). According to Wanlin (2016), based on various summaries of these scientific studies (Dessus, 2002; Tochon, 1993; Wanlin, 2009), teachers say that they plan for three non-hierarchical functions, i.e.:

- 1) For personal and psychological reasons: planning helps reduce teacher anxiety, provides better control over the unexpected, enhances personal mastery of the knowledge being taught, and helps develop positive routines that not only help reassure the teacher, but also improve their effectiveness. In addition, these routines help provide a reassuring learning environment for students (Charlier, 1989);
- 2) To ensure better pedagogical coherence: planning helps to define and organize objectives, learning activities and their coherence more clearly;
- 3) For administrative and organizational purposes: planning enables the various competencies or objectives (or even content) to be sequenced over time, ensuring that the entire academic curriculum is covered.

It should also be noted that different pedagogical trends influence how teaching is planned and the importance given to the various elements to be planned (Altet, 2000). In very general terms, behaviorism emphasizes rigorous planning, based on step-by-step logic: the teacher adheres to the plan designed to achieve very specific operational objectives. Once the sequence is completed, they analyze it and may revise their design for the next time. Cognitivism and constructivism, give greater importance to interactions with and between students, context, discipline specificities and, above all, learning processes. Planning is, therefore, more dynamic, less step-by-step and more circular. Moreover, Altet (2000) prefers to speak of preparation rather than planning. The teacher prepares teaching-learning situations that enable interaction with and between students. In this way, planning takes place throughout the sequence, and the initial project is regulated throughout the process.

Today, particularly with the competency-based approach, curricula are much more extensive, giving teachers more flexibility to plan learning paths. It is up to the teacher to make the transition from the formal or real curriculum to the final “didactic transposition” (Brousseau, 1998). For this reason, even in a competency-based approach, it is important that the planned learning project be very clear. However, various studies have shown that teachers are more likely to plan course content and teaching strategies, and less likely to plan learning strategies and obstacles that students will encounter (Altet, 2000). In other words, teachers plan more for teaching than for learning.

### ***The contributions of planning for assessment of learning***

As previously mentioned, Wanlin’s (2009) summary shows that teachers plan teaching and learning to varying degrees using a variety of methods. Elements relating to the assessment of learning, however, are very often not part of their planning. According to this summary, teachers regard the objectives and assessment of learning as formal elements and devote more time planning more practical elements, such as student activities and tasks. This finding was recently corroborated by Sallin’s (2020) research into secondary education in Switzerland. This qualitative research (interviews and analysis of planning documents with ten teachers, each responsible for two to three school subjects) showed that, for them, planning the assessment of learning is mainly limited to setting a date for a summative exam with the aim of certification.

And yet, since the 1970s, research, particularly in the field of assessment of learning (Mottier Lopez & Laveault, 2008), has demonstrated the importance of defining learning objectives and communicating them clearly to students, in order to foster their learning. Tourneur (1989) has listed around twenty experimental studies demonstrating the positive effects of communicating objectives to students. More recently, Hattie’s (2009) synthesis has shown a significant positive effect of objectives on student learning ( $d = 0.56$ ; 34<sup>th</sup> rank; 11 meta-analyses). “Targeted learning” (Hattie, 2017) includes the objectives (target objectives or competencies, depending on the programs) but also the assessment criteria. The same synthesis shows that planning and communicating objectives also promotes another of the most powerful factors for improving student learning: teacher clarity ( $d = 0.75$  ; 8<sup>th</sup> rank; 1 meta-analysis).



Based on the results of his syntheses, Hattie (2012; 2017) proposes a “backward design” strategy conceptualized by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) to address the two aspects of targeted learning and clarity previously mentioned. According to Hattie (2017), this is “one of the best ways to maximize learning” (p. 152). Backward design (also known as backward planning) underlines the importance of a successive three-step planning process (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2010, p. 26):

- 1) Determine the desired results. Start by clearly identifying the targets to achieve (competencies and/or objectives) in the programs and set priorities to aim for sustainable learning;
- 2) Determine valid proof. Clearly identify what success looks like (e.g., prototypical situations, success criteria) and plan the assessment approaches to be implemented during learning that correspond to the desired results;
- 3) Plan the learning experiences and preferred pedagogy. Plan the main methods to achieve the desired results: the prerequisites, main activities, various teaching strategies.

The backward design strategy puts assessment at the heart of planning. It goes further than simply identifying learning objectives, and asks teachers, “to think like assessors” when planning. (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2010, p. 26). The objective of backward design is not to plan teaching for student success on a final exam (teaching to the test) (Popham, 2001), but to plan how to achieve success criteria. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2010), it enables teachers to avoid certain pitfalls: avoid mainly planning activities that although interesting, are sometimes far removed from the learning objectives (especially at the primary level); avoid planning to complete all the textbook content and not achieving the desired objectives and/or competencies (especially at the secondary level). In this way, backward design helps to achieve curricular alignment (Anderson, 2002; Pasquini, 2019) throughout the sequence, i.e., to ensure coherence between program expectations, classroom activities and various assessment approaches.

### ***Competency-based approach, in-depth learning: current issues in planning and assessment of learning practices***

Since the 2000s, most French-speaking countries have opted for curriculum reform (Jonnaert & Defise, 2009). These changes have led various educational systems to opt for a social constructivist perspective of

learning, integrating the competency-based approach (Legendre, 2004). According to Morissette and Legendre (2011), this approach takes a long-term perspective of learning, making it inseparable from the thinking process that must also be taught and learned (p. 125). This perspective means that the assessment of learning strategies be integrated into the teaching-learning process (Legendre and Morissette, 2014). It is the teacher's role to plan learning and assessment situations to enable the student to develop "resources", and then apply them in competency situations (Gérard, 2013; Roegiers, 2010). It should also be noted that a competency is never really attained and that students make use of their resources in many different ways. According to Von Glasersfeld (2004), all learning takes place through situational experimentation. Thus, by being active, students can use their resources to resolve a situation in a sustainable way. However, what is sustainable for one person is not necessarily sustainable for another. Two separate students may use different resources but achieve the same result. Consequently, when planning their teaching, teachers need to take into account their students' different learning needs, in terms of their pace and level of learning, for example, or the importance they attach to academic learning (Bergeron, 2018).

The competency-based approach is not effective in all school jurisdictions since some curricula or programs are based on learning objectives. However, there is a commonly shared objective in most educational systems: the purpose of school is not simply to develop memorization strategies, but rather to develop learning that is transferable to various challenges in the future. There is a strong trend emerging from the reflections of certain researchers who speak of "in-depth learning" (Tochon, 2013) (Fullan et al., 2018). To achieve this objective, the assessment of learning cannot sanction the knowledge the student has memorized. Rather, it should support them in their strategies for developing complex competencies and/or learning, in order to become autonomous in the face of a variety of challenges. Depending on school curricula, most of which target complex learning (stipulated in the form of competencies or objectives, depending on the jurisdiction), the teacher must develop and plan an assessment process that will enable the collection and use of different types of data to make decisions, both to support learning and assess it (Laveault & Allal, 2016). What's more, assessment itself is a learning process (assessment as learning) (Earl, 2013); a competency both to be learned and for learning. For Mottier Lopez and Girardet (2022), the concept of

continuous assessment for learning considers that beyond the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge, assessment practices also aim to develop transversal competencies that are useful and transferable throughout life.

### ***Implementing assessment for learning***

Empirical surveys (questionnaires and/or interviews), of teachers' concepts of assessment of learning in various French-speaking contexts show that primary and secondary school teachers broadly accept the regulatory purpose of assessment and the importance of criterion-referenced assessment, while the majority reject the sanctioning and/or selection aims of comparing students with each other (normative assessment) (Fagnant & Goffin, 2017; Issaieva et al., 2015; Luisoni & Monnard, 2015; Monney & Fontaine, 2016). However, some studies show that teachers' practices, particularly at the secondary level, are often limited to a classic, rather narrow concept of assessment, from a behaviorist perspective (Fagnant & Goffin, 2017; Issaieva & Crahay, 2010). For many teachers, formative assessment often remains synonymous with a formal test that prepares students to pass a summative test aimed at certification at the end of the sequence or that is incorporated into comments on the results of such a test. The latter provides a dispassionate assessment of learning outcomes at the end of the sequence, without taking into account the student's path and progress. In this case, it is mainly, if not solely, the aim of certification that takes precedence. For Fagnant and Goffin (2017), these various studies show that assessment of learning remains distant from the assessment for learning paradigm (De Ketele, 2012): assessment is not well integrated into learning situations and students are not very involved in the assessment process. The obstacles that hinder or prevent teachers from implementing assessment that supports learning can be attributed to the social functions of the school and its structures (e.g., selection targets, program density, large student population), but also to the teachers' beliefs and competencies (Issaieva et al., 2015).

The formative assessment concept – inherited from mastery learning, most notably from Bloom et al. (1971) – was first expanded in the 1990s to 2010 (Allal & Mottier Lopez, 2005). Today this concept is central to the policies of many countries and jurisdictions in America, Europe and Oceania (Laveault et Allal, 2016). Allal and Laveault (2009) define assessment for learning as:

Assessment for learning is part of the daily practice of students and teachers who, individually and interactively, seek out, reflect on and respond to information from discussions, demonstrations and observations to promote ongoing learning (p. 102).

According to Laveault and Allal (2016), the assessment for learning concept introduces a new conceptualization of assessment in all its forms (formative and summative) and functions (regulative and certificatory). Based on what we have read from these authors, this makes the assessment process more dynamic and interactive by:

- integrating continuous assessment into learning activities;
- involving students in the assessment process;
- taking into account not only the cognitive dimension, but also affective and social dimensions;
- using a variety of formal and informal tools and processes;
- articulating different assessment situations (formative and summative) to promote learning, but also to certify it.

According to Allal (2019), assessment for learning is closer to contemporary theories of teaching and learning, since it is based on the principle of regulation, similar to sociocognitive theories. Allal (2007) and Laveault (2007) maintain that, to be successful, the regulation process requires 1) clear objectives, 2) monitoring student progress, 3) feedback and 4) interventions. Identified objectives (e.g., a competency or objective with precise criteria) make it possible to carry out a “criterion-referenced assessment” (Allal, 2008). Assessment for learning requires a variety of relatively explicit tools, and varying degrees of stakeholder involvement, depending on the needs, didactic situations and stages of the learning process. Learning assessment is not only the teacher’s responsibility but also that of the learners themselves and among each other. It promotes active student involvement in the process (*assessment as learning*) (Earl, 2013) and aims for learner self-regulation (Cosnefroy, 2011; Panadero et al., 2018), in joint action with the teacher (co-regulation) (Allal, 2019). Lastly, assessment for learning breaks down the traditional barriers between formative and summative assessment and formalizes the idea of their possible synergies (Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2018; Harlen, 2005). In this concept, any assessment situation (formalized test, portfolio, classroom observation, etc.) can be an opportunity to have a positive impact on learning, if it is implemented with a view to support learning (Allal and Laveault,

2009; Laveault and Allal, 2016). According to these authors, under certain conditions, even a certification-based summative assessment, (e.g., a graded report at the end of a sequence) can have a positive impact on learning. Some formative information gathered during the sequence can also contribute to this summative assessment. However, these synergies are not automatic. According to Harlen (2005), they are made possible through the various assessment approaches planned by the teacher, each with their own intentions but as part of a common process, and through the establishment of criteria to guide this process. For Laveault and Allal (2016), beyond the simple intention of supporting learning (as a prerequisite), the synergies between formative and summative must be formalized in the teacher's design of the assessment process, which determines the functions and terms and conditions of the various assessment situations and enables the various data gathered to be linked together.

### ***Flexible planning of assessment of learning***

As mentioned in the first section, planning is part of the ten principles outlined by the Assessment Reform Group (Broadfoot et al., 2002) to guide teachers towards assessment for learning. As with backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), planning must enable the teacher to establish targets and success criteria, plan the gathering of information and organize opportunities for feedback. Nonetheless, the planning must remain flexible, i.e. adaptable to students' learning progress. Also, according to this principle, the teacher must also plan the student's role and involvement in the process. In this way, flexible planning enables the teacher to prepare a clear initial project, while also leaving plenty of room for reacting to learning progress, classroom events and interaction with students. It avoids the negative impacts of overly rigid planning. As such, flexible planning brings together the various quality criteria for planning proposed by Maulini (2004): it is hierarchical, dynamic and interactive.

- *Hierarchical.* As with backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), flexible planning guides the teacher, in the pre-active phase, in developing a clear project. It helps establish the priorities that will serve as guidelines for the project (objectives/competencies and success criteria; traces of learning; significant activities), and then to find the different paths to get there (necessary steps, unavoidable situations and activities, different strategies, necessary, secondary or even unnecessary obstacles for certain students). The teacher knows where they need to lead their students, without preparing

the entire sequence in detail, which could lead to excessive rigidity. This quality of planning means that the teacher clearly identifies the major points, the guidelines that will direct their action and that of their students in the medium-to-long-term.

- *Dynamic*. Flexible planning is also dynamic. During the interactive phase, the teacher prepares to adapt their initial plan according to classroom events, for example, by taking more time or speeding up, depending on their observations. Backtracking or jumping forward are made possible and encouraged according to the teacher's observations. Room for improvisation (Tochon, 2013), i.e. more unstructured moments when activities are not determined in detail beforehand, are provided for and made possible thanks to a clear hierarchy of elements.
- *Interactive*. Flexible planning is not limited to only the teacher's reflection. When planning, the teacher leaves the students an important role, with aspects that allow their reactions and learning needs to be taken into account (Bergeron, 2018). Moments are set aside when planning the sequence to involve students in certain choices, to modify the initial projects or to introduce alternatives for the interaction. The teacher is particularly interested in the cognitive needs that have been identified, the interests expressed and the progress made by the students. They provide moments and tools to identify them and allow the students to express themselves. They also anticipate these reactions by preparing different paths to achieve the targets.

These characteristics are consistent with the contributions of Wiliam (2011), for whom specifying and communicating learning intentions and success criteria is the first of five key strategies for implementing assessment for learning. Added to this is the importance of regular feedback and student involvement in the assessment process, which are made possible and effective by setting clear objectives. It is worth recalling here, the significant potential of feedback on student learning, as summarized by Hattie's synthesis (2009) ( $d = 0.73$ ; 10<sup>th</sup> rank; 23 meta-analyses). However, not all feedback is effective. According to the literature (Calone & Lafontaine, 2018; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), effective feedback must meet certain conditions: answer three essential questions (Where do I need to go? Where am I now? What can I do to get closer to what is expected?); be focused on the learning process and not on the

individual; refer to clear criteria; provide feedback as soon as possible and on a regular basis. In addition, feedback must be understood and perceived as useful by the recipient, in order to lead them to take action (Carless & Boud, 2018).

For a greater effect, Black and Wiliam (2009) note that support for student learning requires frequent, spontaneous and informative formative assessment while students are learning. By supporting math and science teachers to use formative assessment during the learning process, these authors were able to demonstrate an increase in student performance of around 80%, assessed using standardized tests. Again, to achieve such results, Black and Wiliam (2009) emphasize that the objectives must be clear to the teacher and understood by the students, and the students must be trained and involved in the process.

Flexible planning makes it possible to establish a clear teaching-learning-assessment scenario (Gérard, 2013), while leaving ample room for reacting to events in the classroom. It requires the teacher to know how to analyze and/or have in-depth understanding of the knowledge involved, and to know and/or anticipate students' learning processes, and to know how to apply/create a variety of teaching methods. The aim of flexible planning of assessment is to implement assessment that supports learning (Laveault & Allal, 2016) and thus, ultimately, promotes in-depth student learning (Fullan et al., 2018; Tochon, 2013).

### ***The potential benefits of flexible planning for the implementation of assessment for learning***

This section proposes a theoretical connection between the concepts defined in the previous section and addresses the following question: How can flexible planning promote the implementation of assessment for learning? To answer this question, we discuss the contributions of flexible planning in terms of three key elements of the assessment for learning concept, according to Laveault and Allal (2016): plan flexibly 1) to better integrate continuous assessment into the sequence; 2) to better link formative and summative situations and 3) to better involve students in their learning.

#### ***Plan flexibly to better integrate continuous assessment into the sequence***

The aim of continuous assessment is to regulate learning throughout the teaching-learning sequence, i.e., “interactive” regulation (Allal, 2019). According to Allal (2007) and Laveault (2007), the regulation process



requires 1) clear learning objectives, 2) monitoring student progress in achieving these objectives, 3) feedback and 4) teacher and/or student actions (regulation; self-regulation; co-regulation) to guide and differentiate learning towards these objectives. Because of its hierarchical nature, like backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), flexible planning requires the teacher (or team of teachers) to clearly identify learning objectives and success criteria before starting the teaching-learning sequence. The teacher can then refer to these throughout the learning process to gather varied traces of learning and provide regular (Black & Wiliam, 2009) and more effective feedback, since they are closely linked to the defined objectives (Calone & Lafontaine, 2018; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

In the pre-active phase of planning, the teacher schedules time for information gathering and feedback, both formally and informally, in the form of oral or written information. If the assessment is continuous, it should not always be formal or of equal importance, otherwise the teacher risks losing their energy and becoming less efficient. Clear objectives promote informal, spontaneous, action-oriented and regular assessment actions, which are more effective than formal one-time tests (Black &

Wiliam, 2009). In this way, assessment becomes part of daily classroom practice. But flexible planning also makes it possible to identify the various moments in the sequence that are most significant and require a degree of formalization. Planning can anticipate these various situations in terms of the different didactic stages of a sequence (discovery, construction, training, transfer). For example, feedback at the end of a sequence is certainly important and can be effective if it provides an assessment of the learning, but it will be all the more useful if it is introduced earlier, during the learning process (Brookhart, 2010 ; Hattie, 2009).

Regular data collection regarding clear objectives enables the teacher to analyze and make decisions during their continuous interaction with students throughout the sequence. This is part of the dynamic nature of flexible planning. This data collection enables the teacher to modify initial choices and/or ensure that they are being carried out correctly. For example, students may encounter unexpected difficulties in a targeted activity. The teacher may modify the activity, keeping in mind that it must target the same objective. To maintain good “curricular alignment” (Anderson, 2002; Pasquini, 2019), teaching strategies, approaches and materials need to be regulated, while enabling teaching, learning and assessment to continue



towards the same goals. To strengthen this dynamic character, flexible planning remains open: the teacher leaves enough room to modify their initial plan. Not everything is planned, only the essential elements (objectives, sequence phases, main activities) are identified and organized.

Flexible planning of assessment promotes interactive dialogue (Black & Wiliam, 2018) with students throughout the sequence. This dialogue, whether informal or formal, enables ongoing interactive regulation. Since students understand the objectives they need to achieve from the start of the sequence, they are in a position to observe their progress towards these objectives throughout the learning process.

### *Plan flexibly to better link formative and summative situations*

The idea of possible synergies between formative and summative assessment has been advocated by many researchers, especially from English-speaking cultures (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Harlen, 2005). The conceptualization of assessment for learning emphasizes the value of these synergies in promoting student learning. According to Laveault and Allal (2016), these synergies can be achieved in three ways, all with the intention of supporting learning: 1) data gathered during the learning process (formative assessment) can be used to help adjust the summative assessment, 2) the summative assessment can be a learning opportunity if its design allows for real feedback and regulatory action and 3) the process can be organized into formative and summative stages for any given production worked on during the sequence. To ensure that these synergies are both possible and effective, the teacher must plan for them, and attach great importance to developing the criteria (Harlen, 2005). The teacher can then adjust their planning during the action in order to achieve the desired targets (objectives or competencies; criteria). When planning a sequence, the teacher can identify the main situations (formative and summative), their specific intentions (to regulate and/or certify) and any possible links between the data collected in this process. They can then guide the teaching-learning-assessment process towards achieving the objectives. For example, the teacher may plan the final situations or productions and may identify the various stages in the process required to achieve them. They may also identify the learning and assessment times (formative and summative) that relate to “resources” and those that relate to “competencies” (Gérard, 2013). It is not a question of preparing different micro-summative tests and averaging them, but rather of identifying and prioritizing which moments require combining detailed information or creating a

broader picture. It is a question of combining “fine-grained or coarse-grained” information (Harlen, 2005; Laveault & Allal, 2016). However, these steps are not fixed. In fact, because flexible planning is dynamic, the previously planned process can be adjusted during the interactive phase, for example, by deleting, adding or modifying an assessment situation or task. Once again, this flexibility is made possible through a clear plan from the outset, which will promote “curricular alignment” (Anderson, 2002; Pasquini, 2019) of the teaching-learning-assessment sequence and enable decision-making focused on the essential elements.

Planning the synergies between the various assessment situations to achieve clear objectives helps plan for the triangulation of significant data to form a “professional judgment” (Lafortune et Allal, 2007) throughout the sequence. By planning the main assessment situations, the teacher can form an in-depth judgment throughout the process instead of having to come to a rushed judgment at the end, within a set period of time (Yerly et al., 2019). This triangulation promotes the validity and relevance of assessment judgement, which is all the more complex in a competency-based approach (De Ketele & Gérard, 2005). To do this, traces (or evidence) of learning need to be collected throughout the process. This is not something that can be achieved instantly but requires careful planning. In fact, by precisely identifying the key objectives and assessment situations, as mentioned above, the teacher is able to ensure that sufficient traces of learning are collected to support their professional judgment. Planning can then be adjusted throughout the sequence, while remaining close to the set objectives. Hierarchical planning enables the teacher to link the activity to the targeted learning, to formalize their observations, and to create tools (e.g., observation grids, tests, portfolios, etc.) enabling continuous observation and recording of traces of learning. The teacher’s planning is therefore dynamic. The teacher plans specific times during the sequence to adapt the number and type of activities to the students’ needs (Bergeron, 2018; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2010) and according to what evidence is required to support their assessment judgment.

### ***Plan flexibly to better involve students in their learning***

Flexible planning, by its very interactive nature, provides opportunities for involving students in analyzing how their learning is progressing and in the decisions that need to be made. The teacher foresees them playing a real role as actors rather than mere contributors. As we have seen, under certain conditions, assessment of learning itself can be considered as a

form of learning (assessment as learning) (Earl, 2013). In their various forms (formative and summative), assessment situations are intended to develop students' self-regulation competencies (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). An initial well-prioritized plan makes it easier for the teacher to communicate learning targets (objectives/competencies; criteria), so that students can understand them, adopt them, then use them as a tool to support their learning. This clear understanding of the learning project should improve the students' chances of success (Hattie, 2017; Mottier Lopez & Laveault, 2008). "Students can attain any target they want as long as they can see it and it does not change [Free translation]". (Davies, 2008, p. 21).

The teacher's planning can include specific times to explain the objectives and criteria to the students and prepare situations for them to use and adopt them. The teacher can also plan to explain the process, as well as what they intend to assess. Yerly and Berger's (2022) questionnaire study shows that, in university education, students' perceptions of the teacher's intentions for an exam can positively influence their self-regulated learning practices. As part of their planning, teachers can include specific times and stages for self-assessment, peer assessment or co-assessment, whose effectiveness will be enhanced as a result of a better understanding of the learning targets. Interactive dialogue also takes place between students. The ultimate goal is for students to become better learners, capable of providing feedback to each other (Mottier Lopez & Girardet, 2022) and themselves, having understood the criteria for success (Wyatt-Smith & Adie, 2021). Teacher's planning can also include specific times and actions to involve students in the (differentiated) choice of assessment situation methods.

Also, in a context where the aim of the program is to develop competencies and/or in-depth learning rather than memorize knowledge, the specificity of the targets evolves according to the student's activity. The student must be able to be involved in the changes being made, and even contribute to the "referencialization" of what is being learned (Mottier Lopez & Dechamboux, 2019). These researchers suggest that the teacher can plan the student's activity so that they can play an active role in establishing or modifying the assessment frame of reference. As part of the planning process, the teacher can involve students in specifying expectations, or even questioning them and defining new criteria. Like the teacher, the student develops a frame of reference for what they need to learn and understand. They interpret the expectations. To achieve this, the teacher needs to engage in an interactive dialogue with the student, involving them

more closely in the assessment process. The interactive nature of flexible planning includes moments when students are involved in analysis and decision-making. It empowers them as actors rather than mere subordinates, so that they can develop in-depth learning (Earl, 2013).

Table 1 summarizes the elements discussed in this article that teachers can take into account in their flexible planning of assessment of learning approaches. These non-exhaustive elements can be considered in the pre-active, inter-active and post-active planning phases in parallel with didactic and pedagogical choices. They are categorized according to the criteria proposed by Maulini (2004).

Table 1  
*Elements that teachers can consider in their flexible planning of assessment of learning approaches*

Hierarchical	<p>Define the targets (competencies or objectives) and success criteria before planning any other elements, in connection with curriculum analysis and the choice of didactic approaches related to academic disciplines.</p> <p>Identify and link the stages of the sequence aimed at acquiring resources and those aimed at applying them (competency situation).</p> <p>Plan the various assessment (formative and summative) situations/moments in order to arrange and link them to the different stages of the sequence (discovery, construction, training, transfer).</p>
Dynamic	<p>Only plan an outline of the sequence, so as to leave room for more in-depth learning, backtracking or more rapid progress.</p> <p>Prepare methods (formal and informal) for continuous assessment of student progress against set targets, in order to adjust the initial project.</p> <p>Plan specific moments to differentiate teaching based on the data collected.</p>
Interactive	<p>Plan brief moments in the sequence to explain the assessment intentions and approaches to the students, and how these fit into the sequence (metacognitive discussions).</p> <p>Plan time at the start of the sequence to co-construct/ formulate success criteria with the students.</p> <p>Plan self-assessment, peer assessment and co-assessment moments vis-à-vis the set targets.</p>

## Conclusion

The main objective of the article was to theoretically discuss how planning can contribute to the effective implementation of assessment to support students in their learning – assessment for learning. Our contribution has been to link the various scientific findings on planning the teaching-learning process with those on the assessment of learning. The article has drawn on empirical research findings that demonstrate the positive effects of teaching-learning planning practices on student learning, as well as the positive effects of assessment practices that support learning. It is also based on more conceptual or theoretical sources on the planning and assessment of learning.

Current scientific knowledge supports, among other measures, flexible planning to promote assessment for learning, which ultimately aims for in-depth student learning. In the article, the notion of flexible planning was analyzed and characterized as planning that is thorough and structured (hierarchical planning), but that also leaves room for adjustments during the interaction (dynamic planning) and involves the students (interactive planning). The article then articulated the various theoretical and empirical elements to examine the potential of such planning as a lever for implementing assessment for learning in the classroom. It can enable teachers to exceed the intention - often accepted but seldom realized - in the assessment project to support student learning. This theoretical article summarizes the benefits of flexible planning to better incorporate continuous assessment into the sequence, to better articulate the formative and summative situations and to get students more involved in their learning.

However, while the benefits of planning for teaching and learning are strongly supported by the literature, they are less proven in the field for the assessment of learning and all the more so for flexible planning. In addition, the development of such practices is likely to come up against major obstacles (complexity of the profession, teachers' identities and beliefs, program density, etc.). As mentioned, flexible practice is most often achieved by expert teachers. It is a competency that reflects a professional posture that goes beyond simply applying a method. It is also based on beliefs and abilities that go far beyond the assessment of learning and are part of a broader project to make teaching more flexible, by taking into account student diversity right from the planning stage, in order to develop

everyone's potential (Bergeron, 2018). This type of planning requires a high level of theoretical and experiential knowledge on the part of teachers (curriculum content, student functioning, didactic strategies, etc.) acquired through training (initial and continuous) and practice in the field. It also requires resources and favorable contextual conditions (teamwork, hierarchical support, etc.) to support teachers in developing this professional competency. Empirical research is, therefore, needed to better understand the conditions required for flexible planning enabling the implementation of assessment for learning.

Received: July 8, 2021

Final version: July 4, 2023

Accepted: July 11, 2023

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